
Chestnut Hill Reservation

Draft Resource Management Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Overview

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) was created in 2003 as a merger of the former Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). The DCR is responsible for the management of 450,000 acres of land, constituting 10% of the state's landmass and including 29 campgrounds, 67 beaches, 39 pools, 2 golf courses, 60 playgrounds, and 55 ball fields. The agency also manages 500 lane miles of parkways, 187 bridges, and 338 dams, and oversees watershed and forestry management across the state.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) mission is to exercise care and oversight for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Commonwealth and to provide quality public outdoor recreational opportunities that are environmentally sustainable, affordable, and accessible to all citizens. To carry out its mission, DCR investigates, analyzes, plans, and provides stewardship of the Commonwealth's resources.

DCR undertook the preparation of the Chestnut Hill Reservation Resource Management Plan (RMP) in response to the transfer of management responsibilities from the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) to the DCR (formerly the Metropolitan District Commission) in 2002. The Reservoir (Bradlee Basin) serves as a back-up water supply for the City of Boston and remains the responsibility of MWRA along with the Shaft 7 parcel,

Gatehouse #2, the dam, and all associated water supply equipment. DCR is charged with the management of the surrounding landscape and roadways, as described in the joint management agreement executed in 2002. The Reservation is also a significant historic resource, with portions listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is designated a City of Boston Landmark. The challenge of joint stewardship, combined with the sensitivity of the historic landscape and significant local support, made Chestnut Hill Reservation a prime candidate for the Resource Management Planning program.

The planning area includes the Bradlee Basin (reservoir) and surrounding landscape, pathways and woodland, Chestnut Hill Driveway, Saint Thomas More Road, and the Reilly Memorial Rink and Pool area. The Plan does not include recommendations for the operation of the Rink and Pool, nor does it address property under MWRA control per the 2002 Agreement (Shaft 7, Gatehouse #2, etc.).

The Chestnut Hill Reservation Resource Management Plan provides a framework for future management and capital investment, while also defining a common vision for property managers, volunteers, and outside stakeholders. The Plan describes clear management objectives along with prioritized recommendations for operations, capital improvements, and potential partnership opportunities. Given the historic significance of the property, all recommendations are consistent with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* as well as the standards set forth by the Boston

Landmarks Commission in their 1989 Study Report and other applicable state and local laws.

Planning Process

The planning process for the Chestnut Hill Reservation RMP has been designed to foster public participation from its onset. To kick off the project, DCR convened the first meeting of the Chestnut Hill Reservation RMP Working Group. The group consisted of over thirty representatives from various neighborhood groups and civic associates, non-profits, local and state government, providing guidance on the RMP process and serving as liaisons to the greater community. The Working Group first met in January 2005 to undertake a visioning exercise and a discussion of issues and opportunities. The group met again in September 2005 to help DCR and its consultants to provide feedback on preliminary findings, and to develop the agenda and logistical details for the first public meeting.

DCR and the consultants presented preliminary findings to the general public at the first public meeting in November 2005. A second public meeting is planned for Spring 2006, during the public comment period for the Draft Resource Management Plan. A final Public Meeting will include a presentation of the final RMP as well as details on early action projects and implementation. A summary of public comment and DCR's response to comments will be included in the appendices of the Final Resource Management Plan.

Management Needs and Alternatives

Current Management Capacity

Chestnut Hill Reservation is part of a cluster of facilities within the West District of the South Region of DCR's Division of Urban Parks and Recreation. The Supervisor for Chestnut Hill Reservation is also responsible for eleven other facilities ranging from Elm Bank Reservation in Wellesley to Quinobequin Road in Newton. The Park Ranger, laborers and other seasonal staff and volunteers are also assigned across the district. The West District Headquarters is located on Hillside Avenue within Blue Hills Reservation in Milton.

Currently, the district/cluster is staffed by one park Supervisor and two staff persons year-round. Personnel increases in May with seasonal staff including one long-term seasonal Forest and Parks Supervisor I, one short-term seasonal Laborer and two short term summer workers. While seasonal staff are assigned to Chestnut Hill

Reservation, they are often deployed elsewhere in the district as priorities shift (i.e. ball field mowing).

Given current staffing levels and funding, Chestnut Hill Reservation can be managed as a passive recreational park, with limited, irregular presence of park personnel or rangers. Some improvements to the landscape can be achieved using qualified seasonal staffing, but without additional, regular support staff, the landscape will remain in its current condition. Given the assignment of Park Rangers across the district, DCR cannot currently address the most common concern of park users regarding safety at the Reservation. Priorities for capital improvements such as pathway rehabilitation and treatment of the historic fence are not currently funded.

Management Alternatives

Level 1 - Maintaining the Baseline

For the purposes of this RMP, Level 1 management will be defined as the management of the facility in its current condition, with no change to the visitor experience. At Chestnut Hill Reservation this includes walking and running on unimproved dirt pathways, passive use such as bird watching, but without programmed interpretive services or regular daily presence of DCR personnel. Seasonal daily maintenance includes lawn mowing, vegetation control and trash pick-up (weekly at a minimum).

In the current system of regional/district allocation of staff and resources, there is no dedicated full time staff or guaranteed seasonal staff for the Reservation; the existing staffing does not support the Level 1 management of the Reservation.

Level 2 - Reclaiming the Landscape

Under the Level 2 management of Chestnut Hill Reservation, DCR staff work toward recapturing the character of the historic landscape. With additional qualified seasonal or short term staff, the Park Supervisor could plan annual projects to address the recommendations of this RMP. Annual efforts could include pathway surface repairs, vista management, and limited planting.

To achieve Level 2 management, skilled seasonal staff would be assigned to Chestnut Hill Reservation every year. It is essential that the park supervisor or district manager be informed of seasonal assignments well in advance to allow time for planning projects, obtaining supplies and scheduling equipment.

Level 3 - Polishing the Urban Gem

Chestnut Hill Reservation is a popular recreational landscape with great potential to showcase historic resources and provide opportunities for public education. Once baseline management is mastered, DCR could strive toward creating an urban gem at Chestnut Hill Reservation, with visitor services/experiences equal to the significance of the park's historic features.

To achieve Level 3 management at Chestnut Hill Reservation, DCR would commit to a program of major capital improvement. As described in Chapter 5, a capital program focusing on the adaptive reuse of historic Gatehouse #1 would establish a contact point for visitors; create opportunities for interpretation, possible partnership with local organizations, and reclaim a lost historic landscape feature (entry drive). In addition, the restoration of Chestnut Hill Driveway could recapture parkland, restore historic plantings, and recreate the driveway experience, so integral to the original concept of the park. This level of management is dependent on the implementation of a number of capital improvements along with an increase in year-round staff; specifically a dedicated Interpretive Ranger, as well as, additional staff to maintain paths, staff Gatehouse #1, and to develop and implement the interpretive programs.

See Chapters 3 and 7 for more information about current management and operations and alternative management levels.

Management Goal

DCR's overall goal in managing the Chestnut Hill Reservation is to preserve the historic and natural features of the landscape while providing accessible recreational opportunities. Based on feedback from the Working Group, DCR developed a vision statement for Chestnut Hill Reservation that recognizes both the unique physical characteristics of the park as well as its vital role in the surrounding urban and suburban communities:

Chestnut Hill Reservation will be a welcoming urban oasis that provides safe access to recreation and solitude within a sustainable, natural, and historical landscape. It is a public open space connecting local communities and serving a diverse group of users.

The management of Chestnut Hill Reservation benefits from the support and advocacy of a network on non-profit groups, volunteers, local institutions and civic organizations.

Specific management objectives include:

1. **Preserve, protect and enhance the extant features from the period of significance (1868-1926) and secondary historic periods and contexts identified in this RMP, while allowing for present day use.** Treatment of character-defining features should be in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* as well as the Standards and Criteria set forth by the Boston Landmarks Commission.

As a cultural resource, the reservation landscape includes topography and ledge outcroppings, planted areas and wooded reserves, historic circulation system, historic buildings and structures, and site furnishings. Specific character-defining features include:
 - Chestnut Hill Driveway
 - The Reservoir basin
 - Gatehouses
 - Scenic views
 - Perimeter pathway around the reservoir
 - Historic trees and shrubs
 - Stone walls and steps
 - The 1928-29 fence.
2. **Recognize the history of Chestnut Hill Reservation within the context of the greater Metropolitan Water Supply system.** Develop interpretive programming that relates the Reservoir to the Waterworks site and other sites within the system.
3. **Provide a place for passive recreation and quiet enjoyment.** Include a universally accessible pathway to serve a wide range of recreational users.
4. **Balance historic landscape preservation with recreation and natural resource protection.** Structure maintenance and vista clearing practices to avoid adverse impacts to woodland health and animal habitat.
5. **Insure that park users feel safe.** Develop and promote a program of regular DCR (or other law enforcement) staff presence; eliminate blind corners; improve egress from the inner loop (perimeter path).

6. **Strengthen and coordinate partnerships.** Cultivate and support a common vision of the Chestnut Hill Reservation, leveraging private funding for capital needs; identify and explore models for management (i.e. Emerald Necklace, Brookline Conservation Commission)
7. **Establish consistent levels of DCR custody, care and control for all areas of the Reservation under its management.** Assess permanent/long-term agreements, including the Chestnut Hill Park parcel.
8. **Establish formal agreements for specialized use of Reservation lands.**
9. **Clarify and promote park rules and regulations.**

DCR Priority Findings

DCR identified a number of potential issues at the onset of the RMP planning process. The Inventory and Analysis (Chapter 3) and public comment on the project confirmed that many of these preliminary issues are indeed the main findings of the RMP.

Access

The most popular feature of Chestnut Hill Reservation is the Reservoir perimeter pathway, which approximates the configuration of the historic pathway around the water's edge. The perimeter pathway is not universally accessible due to the deteriorated surface and the fact that several of the paths leading to it are not accessible. Long sections of fencing also prevent ready access or egress from the path system. Some panels of 1977 fencing have been removed to accommodate access.

Parking

There are over 148 parking spaces along Chestnut Hill Driveway, none of which provides a visitor with direct access to the Reservoir perimeter path and outer pathway. Almost all of these spaces are used by area residents, specifically those who live in the apartments that back onto Reservation lands. Historically, the Driveway was designed as a broad pleasure drive, with views toward the reservoir. The 1977 parking design compromises the historic character of the Driveway, altering the original driveway edge and placing vehicles directly in the line of sight from several areas inside the Reservation. Data collected during this

RMP reveals that the vast majority of park users live less than 0.5 miles from the facility and walk or bike there.

Deteriorating historic features

The Chestnut Hill Reservation landscape has suffered from years of minimal maintenance, and the current condition of landscape features are symbolic of past neglect. The deterioration of the 1928-1929 fencing is the most significant of these, although an abandoned playground and eroding pathways are also visible reminders of past management shortfalls. The fence will be preserved to the extent necessary to understand its historic function and/or to insure resource protection and public safety in the present

Loss of Landscape Character

Although the primary feature of the Chestnut Hill Reservation - the Bradlee Basin - remains intact, the original landscape design has been compromised somewhat through lack of maintenance. For example, the Commonwealth has not had the capacity to maintain a manicured turf edge along the Reservoir perimeter path, vistas have become overgrown, and historic vegetation has been lost or overrun by invasive species. However, the character of the landscape can be recaptured through targeted maintenance practices.

Deteriorating circulation system

Both the historic Reservoir perimeter path and more contemporary paths in the wooded area behind Reilly Pool and Rink are in poor to fair condition. Desire lines have created rutted, eroded paths, and existing paved pathways are difficult to traverse. Furthermore, the existing pedestrian circulation is not an integrated system, and visitors have created desire lines from the woodland paths to the Reservoir perimeter.

Inconsistent levels of management control

Although Chestnut Hill Reservation is managed as a state recreational facility, not all of the land within the Commonwealth boundary is protected at the same level. The 17.55 acre "Chestnut Hill Park" area which contains the Chestnut Hill Driveway, portions of Saint Thomas More Road and the northern wooded area behind the Commonwealth Avenue apartments are under a 99-year lease to the DCR from the City of Boston. Three small parcels wrapping around the Shaft 7 area are under permit to Boston College, and the Chestnut Hill Reservoir Community Garden is located on the Chestnut Hill Driveway. Private property owners have also placed grilles and picnic tables in this area, creating the perception that the

property is not part of the public park. The Driveway, in particular, is a significant landscape feature associated with the development of the public park at Chestnut Hill Reservoir. Consistent management of the Driveway and the greater landscape is vital to the protection of the cultural resource.

Gatehouse #1 is not currently under the control of DCR, although this area has been identified as a key gateway for the Reservation, with great potential for interpretive use and for provision of universally accessible parking.

Inappropriate alterations

Chestnut Hill Reservation is a landscape that has evolved over time to accommodate changing needs. Some of these changes have achieved significance in their own right as part of the history of the site. Others have radically altered the historic landscape. The non-historic 1977 improvements included a playground (now abandoned), extensive parking along Chestnut Hill Driveway, lighting, paved pathways and other changes that are not consistent with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Cobra head lighting and modern stone walls stand out as new features against the backdrop of the historic landscape.

Enforcement and Regulations

People use Chestnut Hill Reservation at all times of the day, despite the posted park hours of dawn to dusk. The park's proximity to well-lighted city streets and uncontrolled access points, along with the presence of light fixtures, give the appearance that the park is open at night. Nighttime use leads to visitors feeling unsafe. There is a need to better communicate park regulations and raise awareness of law enforcement procedures.

Natural Resource Values

Despite the small land area of Chestnut Hill Reservation, many people greatly value the natural resources of the park. The natural woodland was identified as a popular feature in the User Survey, and birding ranked high among the many park uses. The protection of natural resources is considered key to preserving the "urban oasis" of Chestnut Hill Reservation and should be achieved through a careful balance with historic preservation and recreational enjoyment.

Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines

Within the framework of DCR's Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines, Chestnut Hill Reservation has two applicable land stewardship zones and a Cultural Resource Overlay. Because the Reservation is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and a designated Boston Landmark, the majority of the facility is contained within the Cultural Resources Overlay, providing a high level of protection to the landscape as a whole. The Cultural Resource Overlay includes all parts of the property listed on either the National Register of Historic Places or designated a local landmark by the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC). These historic designations exclude only the Reilly Rink and Pool area, the Gatehouse #1 area, and the Shaft 7 parcel (for which DCR has no control). Procedures for the protection of cultural resources, including regulatory compliance with the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the BLC, can be found in Chapter 4 of this RMP. Zone 2 guidelines are recommended for the Reservoir landscape, pathways and wooded areas, while Zone 3 guidelines are more suitable for the more developed areas such as paved park roads and the rink/pool area. See Chapter 5 for further information about Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines.

Recommended Preservation Treatment

The treatment approach for the Reservation is one of **rehabilitation**, defined as "the act of process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values."

Rehabilitation is recommended "when repair and replacement of deteriorated features are necessary; when alterations or additions to the property are planned for a new or continued use; and when its depiction at a particular period of time is not appropriate."

Recommendations

Management Recommendations

- Develop partnerships with active local groups to develop programs and leverage private support for capital improvements.
- Work with MWRA to facilitate DCR reuse of Gatehouse #1 and entry area while allowing for access and maintenance to water supply equipment.

- Formalize or negotiate new agreements with specialized users. Specifically, DCR should review the 99-year lease agreement with the City of Boston, the use of lands by the Chestnut Hill Community Gardens, and the permit to Boston College for lands near Shaft 7.
- Increase availability of park information, including maps and copies of park regulations.
- Ensure adequate seasonal staffing to meet baseline level of management, specifically related to trash removal.
- Increase law enforcement staff or develop Park Watch program to promote safety and decrease unauthorized camping and nighttime use.

Capital Improvements

Highest Priority

High priority capital improvements are recommended to resolve public health, safety and welfare issues, and protect the historic resource:

- Development of a “gateway” at Gatehouse #1, possibly including interpretive or visitor services in the building, accessible parking and pathways from the historic entry drive, and signage;
- Rehabilitation of the Reservoir perimeter pathway as a 10’ wide multi-use path;
- Repair and remove sections of the 1928-29 fence;
- Remove hazardous trees;
- Remove 1977 playground and retaining wall; remove 1977 lighting;
- Clean out and inspect catch basins.

Of these high priority capital improvements, potential Early Action Projects include the repair and removal of sections of the 1928-29 fence and repaving the perimeter path.

Medium Priorities

Medium priority capital improvements are needed to restore and enhance the prime historic and natural assets of the park:

- Rehabilitate the Chestnut Hill Driveway through the removal of non-historic additions (parking, rumble strips); repair of extant historic features; and new paving, curbs, and historic style lighting.

- Develop and implement vegetation management plans to sensitively restore vistas, maintain existing vegetation, control invasive species, and restore missing plant features.
- Repair the stone wall along Chestnut Hill Avenue.

Lower Priorities

Lower priority capital improvements provide additional enhancements to natural and cultural resources and public use:

- Construct pedestrian gateways with signage, landscaping, trash receptacles and dog-mitt stations.
- Create a new accessible path system between the Reilly Memorial Pool and Rink and Commonwealth Avenue.
- Remove existing street lights on Saint Thomas More Road and replace with historic-style lights.
- Install new site amenities and landscape enhancements such as street trees, turf, historic style benches, and bike racks.